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AUTHOR Harnish, Richard J.
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ABSTRACT

Recently, there has been a renewed interest in the functional theories of attitudes. These theories assume that there are certain individualistic needs that are being met by one's attitudes, and that these attitudes allow the individual to implement certain plans to attain certain goals. This study examined whether source characteristics (i.e., likability) and argument quality (i.e., strength) might serve different functions for high and low self-monitors. Subjects (N=103), undergraduates who were classified as high or low self-monitors, were assigned to experimental conditions of a 2 (source of message; likable or dislikable) x 2 (argument strength; strong or weak) factorial design. Overall, the results of this study generally supported the hypotheses that peripheral cues and message quality have different effects as a function of self-monitoring and, thus, perhaps as a consequence of different functions of attitudes for these two types of individuals. These findings have several implications especially for researchers investigating attitudes and persuasion processes. It appears that source characteristics and argument strength have functionally different effects on high and low self-monitoring individuals in the amount of attitude change experienced and in the mode of cognitive processing performed on a persuasive message. (ABL)

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Effects of Self-monitoring, Likability and Argument Strength on Persuasion

Richard J. Harnish

Michigan State University

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Author's Note: Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Richard J. Harnish, Department of Psychology, Psychology Research Building, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824-1117, (517) 335-9561.

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Abstract

The research findings of DeBono (1986, 1987) suggest that high self-monitors should be more persuaded by a message presented by a likable source because the likable source serves a social-adjustive function for high self-monitors. Low self-monitors should be more persuaded by strong rather than weak arguments, because argument strength would be serving a value-expressive function for low self-monitors. To test these hypotheses, high and low self-monitors heard a strong or weak message presented by a likable or dislikable source. Results are discussed in terms of the functional cues that likability and argument quality appear to serve for high and low self-monitoring individuals.

Effects of Self-monitoring, Likability

and Argument Strength on Persuasion

Recently, there has been a renewed interest in functional the functional theories of attitudes (Katz, 1960; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956). These theories assume that there are certain individualistic needs that are being met by one's attitudes, and that these attitudes allow the individual to implement certain plans to attain certain goals. Four functions, in particular, have been proposed: ego-defensive, attitudes formed to protect oneself from undesirable truths; knowledge (object appraisal), attitudes that are formed to give meaning to objects; value-expressive, attitudes that permit the individual to express his or her own beliefs or dispositions; and social-adjustive, attitudes that are formed on the basis of how well they permit the individual to fit into certain situations and permit him or her to behave in a socially appropriate manner in regard to various reference groups (Katz, 1960; Smith et al. 1956).

Past research conducted by DeBono and his colleagues (e.g., DeBono, 1986, 1987; DeBono & Harnish, 1988; Snyder & DeBono, 1985) has examined individual differences in the functional bases of attitudes and their impact on persuasion. Specifically, they examined the role that self-monitoring (Snyder, 1974) plays in the persuasion process. High self-monitors are individuals who regulate their expressive self-presentations for the sake of public appearance. These persons are highly responsive to social and interpersonal cues concerning situationally appropriate behavior. High self-monitors are concerned with impression management issues and, therefore, strive to be the "right person in the right place at the right time."

In contrast, individuals low in the personality construct of self-monitoring lack the ability or the motivation to regulate their expressive selves. Instead, their behaviors are thought to reflect their own

enduring or momentary inner states--their own attitudes, values or beliefs. Of prime concern to these individuals is that their behaviors reflect their internal states, regardless of their social environment (Snyder & Gangestad, 1987).

DeBono's research has been concerned with the content of persuasive messages and the functions that these attitudes could serve individuals differing in their self-monitoring propensities. As such, his findings are consistent with the speculation that high self-monitors might be especially responsive to the attractiveness that a source possesses, whereas low self-monitors might be especially responsive to the expertise a source possesses. That is, high self-monitors could be especially responsive to a source that permits their attitudes to serve a social-adjustive function and, thus, such persons would be likely to perceive positions advocated by an attractive source as helpful in achieving their goal to fit into important social and interpersonal situations. In contrast, low self-monitors could be especially responsive to an expert source because the source might permit their attitudes to serve a value-expressive function. That is, the attitudes presented by an expert source might help low self-monitors express their true self--in other words, their underlying values, beliefs, and dispositions if the low self-monitor holds the same attitude. By agreeing with the expert source, low self-monitors could reaffirm their own values and remain true to self.

The purpose of the present research was to examine if source characteristics (i.e., likability), and argument quality (i.e., strength) might serve different functions for high and low self-monitors. Because the high self-monitor regulates his or her expressive self for the sake of public appearance, a likable source could be useful to the high self-monitoring individual as a means for achieving the goal of presenting him or her self as behaving in a socially appropriate manner and thus being socially desirable. Under such conditions, high self-monitors should be motivated to expend cognitive

energy to process messages presented by a likable source and thus should only be persuaded when the likable source presents cogent arguments.

In contrast, because low self-monitors strive to have their behaviors and internal states remain consistent across social situations, message quality could be useful for the low self-monitoring individual in that strong compelling arguments might permit low self-monitors to validate their own beliefs. Thus, low self-monitors would be more attentive to the quality of a persuasive message in general and be motivated to expend cognitive energy to process messages arguments.

Method

Subjects and Design

One hundred and three undergraduates (24 males, 79 females) participated in this study to earn extra credit towards their grade in their introductory psychology course. Based on their responses to pretest materials (i.e., the Self-Monitoring Scale, Snyder & Gangestad, 1986, and a celebrity likability questionnaire), high or low self-monitoring subjects were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions of a 2 (source of message; likable or dislikable) x 2 (argument strength; strong or weak) factorial design.

Procedure: Independent Variables

Self-monitoring

As part of a larger questionnaire study administered earlier in the term, individuals completed the Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). On the basis of a median split of their responses to the Self-Monitoring Scale, half the participant were classified as high self-monitors (scores $\geq$ 10) and half as low self-monitors (scores $\leq$ 9).

Sources

Individuals also completed a questionnaire which examined celebrity likability. This questionnaire consisted of television, cinema, and recording artists. Bill Cosby and Bruce Willis (minimum rating 5 on a 7-point scale) were chosen as the likable sources, and David Lee Roth and Barry Manilow (maximum rating 4 on a 7-point scale) as the dislikable sources.

Messages

Subjects were told that a "Detroit-based consulting firm has asked us to help them with some market research. The firm was interested in knowing if there is any student support for a charity event (Home Aid) that would raise money for the hungry and homeless. The firm had contacted a few celebrities, but some of the celebrities were not sure whether or not to participate in the fund raiser. This was Bill Cosby's (Bruce Willis, David Lee Roth, or Barry Manilow) reaction to the firm's request. Please take the next two minutes to read the statement." Subjects then read one of two sets of arguments why the celebrity would not support Home Aid consisting of either strong, compelling arguments, or weak, specious arguments.

To determine the strength of the two sets of message arguments, a t-test was conducted on a pretest measure of perceived argument quality. As expected, the two set of message arguments differed significantly, $t(40) = 2.92$, $p < .006$ (strong argument, $M = 4.24$, and the weak arguments, $M = 2.90$).

Dependent Measures

Attitude measure. The postmessage measure of persuasion was taken immediately following the message presentation. Subjects indicated their attitudes toward Home Aid on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = not at all, and 7 = very much so. The scale consisted of the following adjectives which were chosen on the basis of their degree of applicability to Home Aid: good, valuable, cruel, justified,

needed, and worthy. The six items were collapsed into a single attitude measure by taking a mean across the six items. Cronbach's alpha calculated for the attitude scale was .82.

Cognitive measures. A thought-listing task was administered after the postmessage attitude measure. Subjects were instructed to write down all the thoughts, ideas, and associations that they had about the statement as they read through the message. Once this task was completed, subjects were then told to go back through the thoughts that they had just listed and indicate which ones were supportive and which were nonsupportive of the celebrity's position.

Manipulation check. After the cognitive response analysis was completed, subjects responded to a short questionnaire that examined their feelings towards the source of the message (e.g., "to what extent do you liked the source?") and a filler task. Then subjects were asked to recall the message arguments.

Results

Manipulation check of source likability

An analysis of variance was conducted on the actors nested within source to examine any differences in the degree of likability among the actors. Results indicated that there was no difference between the two likable sources (i.e., Bill Cosby, M = 6.68, and Bruce Willis, M = 6.52) in their degree of likability and that there was no difference in the degree of likability between the two dislikable sources (i.e., David Lee Roth, M = 3.30, and Barry Manilow, M = 3.28), $F(2, 98) = .10$, $p > .90$. Because the analysis revealed that there was no significant difference in the degree of likability between the two likable sources, or between the two dislikable sources, the specific source was disregarded in all subsequent analyses. The preliminary analysis also indicated that there was a significant difference in the degree of likability between the two types of sources (i.e., likable and dislikable), $F(1,98) = 834.14$, $p < .001$, a result that is consistent with the intended manipulation.

Postmessage attitude scores. Attitude scores, as measured by the postmessage attitude scale, were submitted to a 2 (self-monitoring) x 2 (argument strength) x 2 (source likability) ANOVA. The mean postmessage attitude scores, which indicate favorable-unfavorable attitudes, are presented in Table 1. (Items were keyed so that lower mean scores are indicative of more favorable attitudes toward Home Aid). The ANOVA revealed a marginal main effect for argument strength, $F(1,93) = 2.70$, $p < .10$, such that subjects tended to be more persuaded by the strong arguments ($M = 4.99$) rather than the weak arguments ($M = 5.26$).

Insert Table 1 about here

The analysis also revealed a significant three-way interaction between self-monitoring, argument strength, and source likability, $F(1,93) = 5.89$, $p < .008$, suggesting that the combined effect of argument strength, and source likability affected the amount of persuasion in high and low self-monitoring individuals. Simple effects tests indicated that low self-monitors were more persuaded when strong arguments were presented by a likable source. In contrast, high self-monitors were least persuaded by weak arguments that were attributed to a dislikable source.

To further examine the source likability finding, a t-test was conducted on the amount of persuasion experienced in the experimental session with the pretested index of Home Aid favorability ($M = 5.5$). The t-test revealed a significant difference in persuasion for high self-monitors who were presented with a likable source ($M = 5.00$), $t(124) = 2.23$, $p < .05$, but not for high self-monitors who were presented with a dislikable source ($M = 5.43$), $t(124) = .34$, $p > .10$ as compared to the pretest sample. In addition, the t-test revealed a significant difference in persuasion for low self-monitors who were presented with a likable source ($M = 5.02$), $t(124) = 2.17$, $p < .05$, and for low self-monitors who

were presented with a dislikable source (M = 5.11), $t(124) = 1.76$, $p < .05$ as compared to the pretest sample.

Overall, these results seem to indicate that for high self-monitors, either source likability or strong message arguments were sufficient to produce greater attitude favorability but that both source likability and strong message arguments did not generate more favorable attitudes than did the presence of one of these persuasive forces. In addition, these results seem to indicate that for low self-monitors, the predicted strength of argument effect occurs only when the source was likable. This result suggests that the combined effects of strong message arguments and source likability were sufficient to produce greater attitude favorability in low self-monitors.

Cognitive Response Analysis

The analysis revealed a significant four-way interaction between self-monitoring, argument strength, source likability and thoughts listed, $F(2, 188) = 3.00$, $p = .05$, suggesting that the combined effects of self-monitoring, argument strength, and source likability had an impact on the types of thoughts generated by the subjects. To further explore this interaction, the supportive thoughts, and counterarguments were then separately examined by a 2 (self-monitoring) x 2 (argument strength) x 2 (source likability) ANOVA.

Thoughts in support of message. A 2 (self-monitoring) x 2 (argument strength) x 2 (source likability) ANOVA was conducted on the supportive thoughts listed by subjects. As seen in Table 2, the analysis revealed a significant two-way interaction between self-monitoring and source, $F(1,94) = 4.3$, $p < .04$.

Insert Table 2 about here

Tukey tests further indicated that high self-monitors listed more supportive thoughts when the source was likable (M = 3.64) than when the source was dislikable (M = 1.65) $p < .05$. There was no significant difference in the amount of supportive thoughts listed by low self-monitors when the source was likable (M = 2.80) or when the source was dislikable (M = 2.42), ns.

Counterarguments. A 2 (self-monitoring) x 2 (argument strength) x 2 (source likability) ANOVA was conducted on the counterarguments listed by subjects. The analysis revealed a marginally significant two-way interaction between self-monitoring and source, $F(1,94) = 2.75$, $p < .10$. Tukey test indicated that high self-monitors listed more counterarguments when the source was dislikable (M = 4.65) than when the source was likable (M = 2.76) $p < .05$. Further, there were no significant differences in the amount of counterarguments listed by low self-monitors when the source was dislikable (M = 2.88) versus when the source was likable (M = 3.15) $p > .05$. The mean number of counterarguments listed by high and low self-monitors are presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

Recall analysis. A 2 (self-monitoring) x 2 (argument strength) x 2 (source likability) ANOVA was conducted on the recall measure. The analysis revealed no significant effects, all ps > .30.

Discussion

Overall, the results of this study generally support the hypotheses that peripheral cues and message quality have different effects as a function of self-monitoring and, thus, perhaps as a consequence of different functions of attitudes for these two types of individuals. These findings have several implications especially for researchers investigating attitudes and persuasion processes. It appears that source characteristics and argument strength have functionally different effects on high and low self-monitoring individuals in the amount of attitude change experienced and in the mode of cognitive processing performed on a persuasive message. Further, the attitude change brought about for high and low self-monitoring individuals appear to result from the differences in the type of function the attitude is serving. Just as high and low self-monitoring individuals' behavioral choices are reflected by either exterior or interior cues, so too are their choices in the amount of attention given to different aspects of a persuasive message. That is, because high self-monitors are sensitive and more responsive to cues in the environment, fewer cues are sufficient to produce persuasion and attitude change for these individuals. Low self-monitors, on the other hand, are less sensitive and responsive to cues in the environment and, thus, require more cues or a combination of cues to produce persuasion or attitude change.

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Table 1

Mean Postmessage Favorability/Unfavorability Scale Scores

	High self-monitors		Low self-monitors	
	Source received			
	Likable	Dislikable	Likable	Dislikable
Argument strength				
Strong	5.06	5.04	4.59	5.21
Weak	4.93	5.81	5.44	5.00

Note. Lower means indicate more persuasion.

Table 2

Mean Supportive Thoughts Listed

	High self-monitors		Low self-monitors	
	Source received			
	Likable	Dislikable	Likable	Dislikable
Argument strength				
Strong	3.23	2.00	3.00	2.31
Weak	4.08	1.00	2.64	2.54

Note. Lower means indicate more persuasion.

Table 3

Mean Counterarguments Listed

	High self-monitors		Low self-monitors	
	Source received			
	Likable	Dislikable	Likable	Dislikable
Argument strength				
Strong	3.69	4.41	2.55	3.46
Weak	1.75	5.11	3.14	2.85

Note. Lower means indicate less persuasion.